DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 354 CG 032 519

AUTHOR	Harris, Henry L.
TITLE	Multiracial Students: What School Counselors Need To Know. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CG-03-05
PUB DATE	2003-09-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0014
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 201 Ferguson Building, P.O. Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170. Tel: 336-334-4114; Tel: 800-414-9769 (Toll Free); Fax: 336-334-4116; e-mail: ericcass@uncg.edu. For full text: http://ericcass.uncg.edu.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Counseling Techniques; Ethnic Stereotypes; *Multiracial Persons; Public Schools; Racial Factors; *School Counseling; *School Counselors; *Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Multiracial individuals represent an expanding population of America's diverse society. Results from Census 2000 showed that of the total 281.4 million people in the United States, 6.8 million of the population indicated their background consisted of more than just one race. Nearly 3 million of respondents within the two or more races population were under the age of 18, and it is safe to assume that many are students in the public school system. This digest provides school counselors with basic information necessary to gain a better understanding of students from multiracial backgrounds. It also will address stereotypes commonly associated with multiracial students, their unique needs, and how school counselors can better respond to this growing population. (Contains 13 references.) (GCP)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 479 354

Multiracial Students: What School Counselors Need to Know

ERIC/CASS Digest
EDO-CG-03-05

Henry L. Harris

September 2003

ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
School of Education
201 Ferguson, P.O. Box 26171
Greensboro, NC 27402-6171

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CG032519

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC CASS DIGEST

Multiracial Students: What School Counselors Need to Know

Henry L. Harris

ERIC

2003
EDO-CG-03-05

Multiracial individuals represent an expanding population of America's diverse society. Results from Census 2000 showed that of the total 281.4 million people in the United States, 6.8 million or 2.4% of the population indicated their background consisted of more than just one race. Ninety-three percent of the multiracial population reported belonging to two racial groups, 6% reported belonging to three racial groups and the remaining 1% reported belonging to more than four races. Nearly 3 million, or 42% of respondents within the two or more races population were under the age of 18 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2001), and it is safe to assume that many are students in our public school systems.

This digest provides school counselors with basic information necessary to gain a better understanding of students from multiracial backgrounds. It also will address stereotypes commonly associated with multiracial students, their unique needs, and how school counselors can better respond to this growing population.

Stereotypes and Myths Regarding Multiracial Individuals

Historically, multiracial individuals have been stereotyped as socially inept individuals who lack culture and are destined to have social and psychological problems associated with racial identity (Stonequist, 1937), thus leading a confused life because they will never fit in or gain acceptance to any racial group (Nakashima, 1992). Too often we hear clichés such as, "I have nothing against interracial marriages, I just feel sorry for the children because they will not be accepted or know who to identify with." According to Brown (1990), to automatically suggest that multiracial individuals will likely have identity problems as a result of their background typically refers to the view that these individuals do not fit neatly into socially defined racial categories and as a result they have trouble determining their position, role, and status in society. It is important for school counselors to treat multiracial students as individuals first and avoid making false assumptions about them based upon characteristics associated with multiracial group membership.

Another stereotype associated with multiracial individuals is the belief that they are more accepted in the minority community and should therefore identify with the parent of color (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). This perspective is associated with elements of the "one drop rule," which originated from the belief that each race had its own specific blood type and just one drop of "Negro blood" provided enough evidence to classify that person as black, regardless of their physical appearance (Valentine, 1995). The ultimate goal behind the "one drop rule" was to promote segregation and discourage social interaction between blacks and whites. However, when multiracial individuals do not culturally identify with both parents, Sebring (1985) contends this may cause them to experience feelings of disloyalty and enormous guilt over their rejection of one parent for the other. Therefore it is crucial for multiracial children to assume a multiracial identity.

Finally, some believe that multiracial individuals do not like to discuss their racial heritage. On the contrary, Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) indicated that when multiracial individuals are approached in a genuine and caring manner, they do not mind such inquiries and may associate this interest with acceptance and support.

How School Counselors Should Respond

School counselors should first develop an awareness of their own personal feelings toward multiracial individuals and multiracial families (Nishimura, 1995; Wardle, 1992). If erroneous or preconceived notions exist about multiracial children or multiracial families, they must be confronted and emotionally resolved if school counselors are to maximize their effectiveness. School counselors should also strive to educate themselves about the emotional needs of multiracial children by reading literature, attending workshops, and talking with multiracial families. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP, 1999) reports that research focusing multiracial individuals has shown that: 1) multiracial children have similar self-esteem levels and experience psychiatric problems at no greater rate when compared to other children; 2) the racial identity of children from the same multiracial family can vary because identity is influenced by factors including family attachments, family support, experiences with diverse racial and ethnic groups, and individual physical features; 3) multiracial children may develop a public identity with the minority race yet also hold a private multiracial identity with family and friends as a way to cope with societal prejudice; 4) multiracial children may encounter obstacles that make it more difficult for them to accept and value the culture of both parents when parents divorce; and 5) multiracial individuals who possess a true multiracial identity are raised in an environment incorporating the values and beliefs of both racial groups and are generally happier than multiracial individuals who identify with the race of only one parent (AACAP, 1999). Multiracial individuals, because of their unique developmental history, will typically possess more insight and sensitivity to both racial groups than single race children because they have the opportunity to personally experience what the racial identity of each implies.

Racial Identity Development for Multiracial Individuals

School counselors should become knowledgeable about the different developmental aspects of racial identity for multiracial individuals. Models developed by Poston (1990) and Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) are helpful resources to school counselors as they learn about this population of students. Learning how to promote the racial identity development of multiracial children is also a common issue for parents. Parents tend to: (1) deny or minimize the significance of race as an important factor in identity development, (2) incorporate the identity of only one parent by immersing the family solely in that parent's particular community,

or (3) encourage multiracial children to embrace all aspects of their multiracial heritage. McRoy and Zurcher (1983) identified a number of significant factors that help facilitate the positive development of racial identity of multiracial children:

- Multiracial children should be encouraged to acknowledge and discuss their racial heritage with their parents, extended family members, and other important individuals in their lives.
- Parents must be able to perceive their child's racial heritage as being different from their own. They should be willing to make changes that will contribute to the development of a positive racial identity in the child.
- Multiracial children should be given the opportunity to develop relationships with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. This can be accomplished by attending a culturally diverse school and by living in a culturally diverse neighborhood.
- The family should form an identity as a multiracial unit.

These factors are significant because even though societal attitudes towards multiracial families and multiracial individuals have improved, stereotypes and prejudice are still likely to be confronted. Harris (2002) found that school counselors validated this perspective. They strongly believed that schools are a microcosm of a society that does not genuinely accept multiracial children, thus the question follows: how genuinely are multiracial children accepted in schools?

The multiracial population in the school setting will continue to increase as our nation's population becomes more diverse. Therefore it is important for school counselors to have an accurate understanding of multiracial individuals and their families. School counselors should work to create a cultural environment in their school setting that embraces diversity because, as Harris (2002) found:

- School counselors who were employed in schools that actively promoted cultural diversity and awareness programs held more accurate perceptions of multiracial children.
- School counselors who were in schools that did not actively promote cultural diversity and awareness programs were more likely to inaccurately: 1) believe that racial identity issues were the major cause of emotional problems for multiracial children, 2) support the perception that multiracial children should identify primarily with the minority parent, and 3) categorize multiracial children with the minority parent.
- School counselors in school settings that actively promoted cultural diversity and awareness programs believed living in a racially diverse neighborhood was helpful in facilitating positive development of racial identity for multiracial children.

Conclusion

This digest has introduced some of the issues that multiracial students face. The school counselor can help to create a positive environment for these students by promoting cultural diversity and awareness programs that debunk myths associated with multiracial individuals. Further, school counselors should be aware of differences between multiracial students and treat them as individuals first. Finally, school counselors should recognize the unique heritage of multiracial individuals and some of the problems they may encounter as a result of their heritage. Multiracial individuals need to feel genuinely valued, supported, and understood and school counselors can play an influential role in helping to communicate this message.

References

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1999). *Facts for families: Multiracial children*. No. 71, www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/71.htm.

Brown, P. M. (1990). Biracial identity and social marginality. *Child and Adolescent Social Work, 7*, 319-337.

Harris, H. L. (2002). School counselors' perceptions of biracial children: A pilot study. *Professional School Counseling, 6*, 120-129.

Kerwin, K., & Ponterotto, J. G. (1995). Biracial identity development. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 199-217). Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.

McRoy, R. G., & Zurcher, L. A. (1983). *Transracial and inracial adoptees: The adolescent years*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Nakashima, C. L. (1992). An invisible monster: The creation and denial of racially mixed people in America. In Maria P. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 162-180). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Nishimura, N. (1995). Addressing the needs of biracial children: An issue for school counselors in a multicultural school environment. *The School Counselor, 43*, 52-57.

Poston, W. S. C. (1990). The biracial identity development model: A needed addition. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 69*,152-155.

Sebring, D. L. (1985). Considerations in counseling interracial children. *Journal of Non-White Concerns, 13*, 3-9.

Stonequist, E. V. (1937). *The marginal man: A study in personality and culture and conflict*. New York: Russell & Russell.

U.S. Bureau of Census. (2001). *Mapping census 2000: The geography of U.S. diversity*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Valentine, G. (1995). Shades of gray: The conundrum of color categories. *Teaching Tolerance, 49*, 47.

Wardle, F. (1992). Supporting biracial children in the school setting. *Education and Treatment of Children, 15*, 63-172.

Henry L. Harris, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Counseling, Development, & Higher Education at the University of North Texas.

ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Contract No. ED-99-CO-0014. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions of the U.S. Department of Education, OERI, or ERIC/CASS.

For information on other ERIC/CASS products and services, please call toll-free (800) 414-9769 or (336) 334-4114 or fax (336) 334-4116 or write ERIC/CASS, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27402.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[ ] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[X] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").